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Emotional behaviour and attitudes in twentieth-century Britain

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My current research is part of an ongoing project on emotional behaviour and attitudes in twentieth century Britain. The project is a biography of a couple, Joan and Miles Malleson.

The biography will examine different emotional styles and levels of emotional intensity expected of, and by, men and women in sexual relationships. This couple experienced a radical and gendered discrepancy in emotional expectations, which challenged their ideals of enduring, mutual passion (rather than companionate marriage). Were different emotional styles functional for women and men and how did they emerge?

It connects my previous research into sexuality with that into emotion. Joan and Miles were also involved in a wide range of progressive causes and their lives and those of their children have much to tell us about the trajectory of thought and experience in mid-twentieth century Britain.

Dr Joan Malleson (1900-1956) was a birth control campaigner and sex reformer. She belonged to the Worker's Group for Birth Control in the 1920s. A letter from her to the *New Statesman and Nation* in 1934 was the first move toward the founding of the Abortion Law Reform Association, in which she played a major role, and which constantly emphasised that working-class women were denied access to the safe medical abortions that middle-class women were able to purchase. By the 1930s, she was also working for the Family Planning Association running sexual problem clinics and following WWII, she contributed to international debates on the defining of female sexual response and wrote an advice manual for couples with sexual problems. Miles Malleson, her husband, was a successful interwar actor, playwright and champagne socialist who went on to have a career in the British film industry in the 1940s and 50s. He married several times and had numerous sexual partners.

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